

## CHAPTER 5

### AIRCRAFT RECONNAISSANCE

**5.1. General.** All Department of Commerce (DOC) tropical and subtropical cyclone aircraft reconnaissance needs will be requested and provided in accordance with the procedures of this chapter. As outlined in the Air Force Reserve Command (AFRC)/National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Memorandum of Agreement (see Appendix C), DOC has identified a requirement for, and the Department of Defense (DOD) maintains aircraft to support, up to five sorties per day (see Figure 5-1). Requirements exceeding five sorties will be accomplished on a "resources-permitting" basis. Congress has directed the DOD to fund an AFRC flying hour program of 1600 hours in support of hurricane reconnaissance coverage. In times of national emergency or war, some or all DOD reconnaissance resources may not be available to fulfill DOC needs.

#### **5.2. Responsibilities.**

**5.2.1. DOD.** The DOD, through AFRC's 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (53 WRS) is responsible for:

- Providing operational aircraft for vortex fixes and data, synoptic surveillance missions, and investigative flights in response to DOC needs.
- Developing operational procedures and deploying data buoys to satisfy DOC needs.

**5.2.2. DOC.** The DOC is responsible for aircraft operations that may be requested to:

- Provide synoptic surveillance soundings (see Figure 5-2).
- Augment AFRC aircraft reconnaissance when DOC needs exceed the capabilities of DOD resources (see Figure 5-3).
- Assume responsibility for hurricane reconnaissance over foreign airspace that may be restricted for military operations.
- Conduct research flights.

**5.2.3 DOT.** The DOT is responsible for providing air traffic control services to aircraft when within airspace controlled by the FAA. This includes offshore oceanic airspace. It should



**Figure 5-1. WC-130 Weather Reconnaissance Aircraft**



**Figure 5-2. G-IV Weather Surveillance Aircraft**



**Figure 5-3. NOAA P-3 Weather Surveillance Aircraft**

be noted that more expeditious handling of reconnaissance aircraft will result by following the procedures outlined in the FAA/AFRC/NOAA Letter of Agreement (LOA) entitled, Meteorological Reconnaissance Flights, and the AFRC/NOAA LOA, as found in Appendix C.

[NOTE: These LOAs are currently being updated to include the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to reflect NASA's participation in multiagency research efforts to improve the tropical cyclone warning system.]

**5.3. Control of Aircraft.** Operational control of aircraft flying tropical and subtropical cyclone reconnaissance will remain with the operating agencies which own the aircraft.

**5.4. Reconnaissance Requirements.**

**5.4.1. Meteorological Parameters.** Data needs in priority order are as follows:

- Geographical position of the flight level vortex center (vortex fix) and relative position of the surface center, if known.

- Center sea-level pressure determined by dropsonde or extrapolation from within 1,500 ft of the sea surface or from the computed 925 hPa or 850 hPa height.
- Minimum 700, 850 or 925 hPa height, if available.
- Wind profile data for surface and flight level.
- Temperature at flight level.
- Sea-surface temperature.
- Dew-point temperature at flight level.

#### **5.4.2. Accuracy.**

##### **5.4.2.1. Geographic Position.**

- Aircraft position: within 3 nm.
- Storm surface center (wind/pressure): within 6 nm.
- Flight level storm center (wind/pressure): within 6 nm.

##### **5.4.2.2. Wind Direction.**

- Surface: within 10 deg.
- Flight level for winds greater than 20 kt: within 5 deg.

##### **5.4.2.3. Wind Speed.**

- Surface: within 10 kt.
- Flight level: within 4 kt.

##### **5.4.2.4. Pressure Height.**

- Surface: within 2 hPa.
- Flight level at or below 500 hPa: within 10 m.
- Flight level above 500 hPa: within 20 m.

##### **5.4.2.5. Temperature.**

- Sea surface: within 1°C.
- Flight level: within 1°C.

#### **5.4.2.6. Dew-Point Temperature.**

- From -20°C to +40°C: within 1°C.
- Less than -20°C: within 3°C.

#### **5.4.2.7. Absolute Altitude:** Within 10 m.

#### **5.4.2.8. Vertical Sounding.**

- Pressure: within 2 hPa.
- Temperature: within 1°C.
- Dew-point temperature:  
From -20°C to +40°C: within 1°C.  
Less than -20°C: within 3°C.
- Wind direction: within 10 deg.  
Wind speed: within 5 kt.

[NOTE: Present weather reconnaissance capabilities do not completely satisfy these requirements; data will be collected as close to stated requirements as possible.]

**5.4.3. High Density/High Accuracy (HD/HA) Data Requirements.** The HD/HA data include time, latitude, longitude, pressure altitude, D-value, radar altitude, peak winds, flight-level wind speed and direction, temperature, and dew-point temperature. The DOC requires rapid acquisition and transmission of tropical cyclone data, especially within the 24-hour period prior to landfall. If HD/HA capability is lost on an operational mission, the airborne meteorologist will contact CARCAH immediately to determine whether a backup aircraft is required and available.

**5.4.4. Synoptic Surveillance Data Requirements.** When required, the NHC will request mid- and/or upper-tropospheric sounding data on the periphery of systems approaching the United States. The NHC and HRD will coordinate to provide specific tracks including control points, control times and dropwindsonde frequency allocations to Chief, Aerial Reconnaissance Coordination, All Hurricanes (CARCAH) for coordination with the reconnaissance units.

**5.4.5. Required Frequency and Content of Observations.** Requirements, where applicable, are summarized in Table 5-1.

**5.4.5.1. Horizontal Observations.** Standard RECCO Section 1, plus 4ddff and 9VTTT, if applicable, (9-groups are not required for WC-130s). The format is as specified in Appendix G of the National Hurricane Operations Plan (NHOP).

- En route. Horizontal observations will be taken and transmitted approximately every 30 minutes. If an automated system is not in use, encode observations every 15 minutes when over water within 15 degrees of the tasked coordinates, and transmit hourly.

- **Fix Missions.** A horizontal observation is required at the end point of each Alpha pattern leg. If HD/HA data are not available, then one additional horizontal observation is required midway between the outbound leg and inbound leg of the Alpha pattern.

- **Invest Missions.** A horizontal observation is required every 15 minutes and at major turn points.

**Table 5-1. Requirement for aircraft reconnaissance data**

	RECCO	VORTEX	SVD <sup>1</sup>	VERTICAL
EN ROUTE	Approximately every 30 minutes while over water.	NA	NA	Every 400 nm while over water
INVEST	Every 15 minutes and major turn points.	After closing the circulation.	NA	NA
FIX	At the end points of Alpha pattern legs. (non HD/HA) At end points and midway between outbound and inbound legs.	Tasked: DVDM <sup>2</sup>  Intermediate: AVDM <sup>3</sup> or DVDM	Two per mission.  (non HD/HA)  One per fix.	Each scheduled fix at 700 mb and above, and as tasked. Others at crew discretion.

**5.4.5.2. HD/HA Data.** HD/HA data are collected every 30 seconds, organized into a HDOB message with a 30-second, 1-minute, or 2-minute data encoding interval and transmitted to NHC. See Appendix G for the WC-130 HD/HA data message formats.

**5.4.5.3. Vortex and Supplemental Vortex Observations.** Vortex and supplemental vortex observations are collected, encoded, and transmitted in accordance with NHOP pattern requirements (see para 5.8). See Figures 5-4 and 5-5; see Table 5-2 for data formats.

**5.4.5.4. Vertical Observations.** The frequency of vertical observations en route to and from the storm or invest area will be approximately every 400 nm over water, unless otherwise specified. Center dropwindsonde data will be provided for scheduled fixes made at 700 hPa or above. The format for all vertical observations is WMO TEMP DROP code (FM 37-VII). See Appendix G for the format.

---

<sup>1</sup> SVD = Supplementary Vortex Data

<sup>2</sup> DVDM = Detailed Vortex Data Message

<sup>3</sup> AVDM = Abbreviated Vortex Data Message

## **5.5. Reconnaissance Planning and Flight Notification.**

### **5.5.1. DOC Requests for Aircraft Reconnaissance Data.**

**5.5.1.1. Coordination.** The National Hurricane Center (NHC) will coordinate with the Central Pacific Hurricane Center (CPHC) to determine a list of the total DOC requirements for data on tropical and subtropical cyclones or disturbances for the next 24-hour period (1100 to 1100 UTC) and an outlook for the succeeding 24-hour period. This coordinated request will be provided to CARCAH as soon as possible, but not later than 1630 UTC each day in the format of Figure 5-6. Amendments will be provided as required.

**5.5.1.2. Tropical Cyclone Plan of the Day.** From the coordinated DOC request, Figure 5-6, CARCAH will publish the Tropical Cyclone Plan of the Day (TCPOD). The format for the TCPOD is shown in Figure 5-7. When DOC reconnaissance needs exceed DOD and DOC resources, CARCAH will coordinate with the NHC to establish priorities of requirements.

**5.5.1.3. Anticipated Reconnaissance Requests.** Reconnaissance requests can be anticipated for a forecast or actual storm location.

- For the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean, and Central Pacific areas, the requests can be:
  - ▶ Up to four 6-hourly fixes per day when a storm is within 500 nm of landfall and west of 55°W in the Atlantic.
  - ▶ Up to eight 3-hourly fixes per day when a storm is forecast to be within 300 nm of the U.S. coast, Hawaiian Islands, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, DOD installations, and other DOD assets when specified.
  - ▶ One synoptic surveillance mission per 24-hour period for potentially landfalling storms.
- Investigative flights may be requested for disturbances in areas defined above, i.e., one or two flights per day dependent upon proximity of landfall and upon known or suspected stage of development.
- Exceptions may be made when additional reconnaissance is essential to carry out warning responsibilities.

DATE		SCHEDULED FIX TIME		AIRCRAFT NUMBER		ARWO	
WX MISSION IDENTIFICATION						OB	
(ABBREVIATED) (DETAILED) VORTEX DATA MESSAGE							
A		Z	DATE AND TIME OF FIX				
	DEG	MIN	N	S	LATITUDE OF VORTEX FIX		
B	DEG	MIN	E	W	LONGITUDE OF VORTEX FIX		
C	MB		M	MINIMUM HEIGHT AT STANDARD LEVEL			
D			KT	ESTIMATE OF MAXIMUM SURFACE WIND OBSERVED			
E	DEG		NM	BEARING AND RANGE FROM CENTER OF MAXIMUM SURFACE WIND			
F	DEG		KT	MAXIMUM FLIGHT LEVEL WIND NEAR CENTER			
G	DEG		NM	BEARING AND RANGE FROM CENTER OF MAXIMUM FLIGHT LEVEL WIND			
H			MB	MINIMUM SEA LEVEL PRESSURE COMPUTED FROM DROPSONDE OR EXTRAPOLATED FROM FLIGHT LEVEL. IF EXTRAPOLATED, CLARIFY IN REMARKS.			
I	C/		M	MAXIMUM FLIGHT LEVEL TEMP/PRESSURE ALTITUDE OUTSIDE EYE			
J	C/		M	MAXIMUM FLIGHT LEVEL TEMP/PRESSURE ALTITUDE INSIDE EYE			
K	C/		C	DEWPOINT TEMP/SEA SURFACE TEMP INSIDE EYE			
L	EYE CHARACTER: Closed wall, poorly defined, open SW, etc.						
M	EYE SHAPE/ORIENTATION/DIAMETER. Code eye shape as: C -Circular; CO - Concentric; E - Elliptical. Transmit orientation of major axis in tens of degree, i.e., 01-010 to 190; 17-170 to 350. Transmit diameter in nautical miles. <i>Examples:</i> C8 - Circular eye 8 miles in diameter. EO9/15/5 - Elliptical eye, major axis 090-270, length of major axis 15 NM, length of minor axis 5NM. CO8-14 - Concentric eye, diameter inner eye 8 NM, outer eye 14 NM.						
	DEG	MIN	N	S	CONFIRMATION OF FIX: Coordinates and time		
	DEG	MIN	E	W			
N			Z				
O	/	FIX DETERMINED BY/FIX LEVEL. FIX DETERMINED BY: 1 - Penetration; 2 - Radar; 3 - Wind; 4 - Pressure; 5 - Temperature. FIX LEVEL (Indicate surface center if visible; indicate both surface and flight level centers only when same): 0 - Surface; 1 - 1500ft; 9-925mb; 8 - 850 mb; 7 - 700 mb; 5 - 500 mb; 4 - 400 mb; 3 - 300 mb; 2 - 200 mb; NA - Other.					
P	/		NM	NAVIGATION FIX ACCURACY/METEOROLOGICAL ACCURACY			
Q	REMARKS						
	MAX FL WIND _____ KT _____ QUAD _____ Z						
	SLP EXTRAP FROM (1500 FT/ 925 MB/ 850 MB/ DROPSONDE)						
	SFC CNTR _____ / _____ NM FROM FL CNTR						
	MAX FL TEMP _____ C _____ / _____ NM FROM FL CNTR						

INSTRUCTIONS: Items A through G (and H when extrapolated) are transmitted from the aircraft immediately following the fix. The remainder of the message is transmitted as soon as available for scheduled fixes and at the ARWO's discretion for unscheduled (intermediate) fixes.

**Figure 5-4. Vortex data message worksheet**



SUPPLEMENTARY VORTEX DATA MESSAGE									
WX MISSION ID					OB				
SUPPLEMENTARY VORTEX DATA MESSAGE					LEGEND				
01 (L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> )	1 (L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> )	1 (jHHH)	1 (TTT <sub>0</sub> T <sub>0</sub> )	(ddfff)	01 INDICATOR FOR DATA COLLECTED APPROXIMATELY 105 NM FROM STORM CENTER (INBOUND) OR APPROXIMATELY 15 NM FROM CENTER (OUTBOUND)  OTHER INDICATORS (02/2, 03/3...) FOR DATA AT APPROXIMATELY 15 NM INTERVALS INBOUND OR OUTBOUND FROM STORM CENTER. INDICATORS MAY BE EXPANDED BEYOND 07(08,09...) AS NECESSARY AT APPROXIMATELY 15NM INTERVALS.  MF = INDICATOR FOR MAXIMUM FLIGHT LEVEL WIND OBSERVED  fff = SPEED OF WIND IN KNOTS  dd = TRUE DIRECTION OF FLIGHT LEVEL WIND SPEED IN TENS OF DEGREES   TTT <sub>0</sub> T <sub>0</sub> = TEMP/DEWPOINT IN DEGREES CELSIUS; ADD 50 FOR NEGATIVE VALUES  jHHH = PRESSURE HEIGHT DATA IN RECCO FORMAT  L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> = LATITUDE IN DEGREES/TENTHS  L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> = LONGITUDE IN DEGREES/TENTHS  / = DATA UNKNOWN/UNOBTAINABLE				
02	2	2	2						
03	3	3	3						
04	4	4	4						
05	5	5	5						
06	6	6	6						
07	7	7	7						
MF (L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> )	M (L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> )	MF (fff)							
OBS 01 AT: Z		OBS AT Z		OBS 01 SFC WND:					
01 (L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> )	1 (L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> )	1 (jHHH)	1 (TTT <sub>0</sub> T <sub>0</sub> )	(ddfff)					
02	2	2	2						
03	3	3	3						
04	4	4	4						
05	5	5	5						
06	6	6	6						
07	7	7	7						
(L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> )	(L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> L <sub>0</sub> )	(fff)							
MF	M	MF							
OBS 01 AT: Z		OBS AT Z		OBS 07 SFC WND:					
REMARKS (end of message)									

Figure 5-5. Supplementary vortex data message

**Table 5-2. Vortex data message entry explanation**

<b>DATA ITEM</b>	<b>ENTRY</b>
MISSION IDENTIFIER	As determined in Chapter 5, paragraph 5.7.6.
OBSERVATION NUMBER	A two digit number determined by the sequential order in which the observation is transmitted from the aircraft.
(ABBREVIATED) VORTEX MESSAGE	An abbreviated message has at least item ALPHA (DETAILED) through GOLF, item HOTEL (when extrapolated DATA from flight level) and a maximum flight level wind remark in item QUEBEC.
A (ALPHA)	Date and time (UTC) of the flight level center fix. If the flight level center cannot be fixed and the surface center is visible, enter the time of the surface center fix.
B (BRAVO)	The latitude and longitude of the center fix associated with item ALPHA. NOTE: If the surface center is fixable, enter bearing and range from the center in item QUEBEC, e.g., SFC CNTR 270/15 nm, if the centers are separated by over 5 nm.
C (CHARLIE)	Indicate the standard atmospheric surface e.g. 925, 850 or 700 hPa.  The minimum height of the standard surface observed inside the center. If at 1,500 ft or below or not within 1,500 ft of a standard surface, enter NA.
D (DELTA)	The maximum surface wind observed during the inbound leg associated with this fix.
E (ECHO)	Bearing and range of the maximum surface wind observed (item DELTA) from the coordinates reported in item BRAVO.
F (FOXTROT)	The maximum flight level wind observed during the inbound leg associated with this fix. If a significant secondary maximum wind is observed, report it in remarks.

**Table 5-2. Vortex data message entry explanation (continued)**

---

---

G (GOLF)	Bearing and range of the maximum flight level wind observed (item FOXTROT) from the coordinates reported in item BRAVO.
H (HOTEL)	The minimum sea level pressure (SLP) to the nearest hectopascal observed at the coordinates reported in item BRAVO. Preface the SLP with "EXTRAP" (extrapolated) when the data are not derived from dropsonde or when the SLP is extrapolated from a dropsonde that terminated early. Clarify the difference in remarks (e.g., SLP EXTRAPOLATED FROM BELOW 1500 FEET/850 HPA/DROPSONDE)
I (INDIA)	<p>MAX FLT LVL TEMP--This temperature is taken just outside the central region of a cyclone (i.e., just outside the eyewall or just beyond the maximum wind band). This temperature may not be the highest recorded on the inbound leg but is representative of the environmental temperature just outside the central region of the storm.</p> <p>PRESSURE ALT--Pressure altitude data (meters) are taken at the same location as the maximum temperature data reported in item INDIA</p>
J (JULIET)	<p>MAX FLT LVL TEMP--The maximum temperature observed within 5 nm of the center fix coordinates. If a higher temperature is observed at a location more than 5 nm away from the flight level center (item BRAVO), it is reported in item QUEBEC including bearing and distance from the flight level center.</p> <p>PRESSURE ALT--Pressure altitude data (meters) are taken at the same location as the maximum temperature data reported in item JULIET.</p>
K (KILO)	Dewpoint temperature/sea surface temperature are collected at the same location as the maximum temperature reported in item JULIET. Enter NA if not observed.

---

---

**Table 5-2. Vortex data message entry explanation (continued)**

---

---

L (LIMA)	<p>Only report if at least 50 percent of the center has an eyewall, otherwise enter NA.</p> <p>Closed wall--if the center has 100 percent coverage with no eyewall weakness.</p> <p>Open XX--if the center has 50 percent or more but less than 100 percent coverage. State the direction of the eyewall weakness.</p>
M (MIKE)	<p>Self explanatory. Report only if item LIMA is reported, otherwise enter NA.</p>
N (NOVEMBER)	<p>Flight level center coordinates (same as item BRAVO).</p>
O (OSCAR)	<p>Fix determined by: Always report 1. Report 2 if radar indicates curvature or banding consistent with fix location. Report 3 if recorded or observed winds indicate a closed center. Report 4 if the fix pressure is lower than all reported on the inbound leg. Report 5 if the fix temperature is at least higher than any reported on the inbound leg.</p> <p>Fix level: Report 0 alone if fix is made solely on surface winds. Report 0 and the flight-level code if the centers are within 5 nm of each other.</p>
P (PAPA)	<p>Navigational and meteorological accuracy are reported as the upper limit of probable error. Meteorological accuracy is normally reported as one-half of the diameter of the light and variable wind center.</p>
Q (QUEBEC)	<p>Remarks to enhance the data reported above. Required remarks include: (1) mission identifier and observation number; (2) the maximum flight level wind observed, time of observation, and the relative quadrant of the storm of the observed wind on the latest pass through any portion of the storm; (3) the method of deriving the central SLP when extrapolated; and (4) the bearing and range of the surface center and/or maximum flight level temperature if not within 5 nm of the flight level center.</p>

---

---

### NHOP COORDINATED REQUEST FOR AIRCRAFT RECONNAISSANCE

\_\_\_ Original  
 \_\_\_ Amendment  
 (Check One)

#### I. ATLANTIC REQUIREMENTS

STORM NAME DEPRESSION # SUSPECT AREA	FIX OR ON STATION TIME	COORDI- NATES	FLIGHT PATTERN	FCST MVMТ	NHC PRIOR- ITY

SUCCEEDING DAY OUTLOOK \_\_\_\_\_

REMARKS \_\_\_\_\_

#### II. CENTRAL PACIFIC REQUIREMENTS

STORM NAME DEPRESSION # SUSPECT AREA	FIX OR ON STATION TIME	COORDI- NATES	FLIGHT PATTERN	FCST MVMТ	NHC PRIOR- ITY

SUCCEEDING DAY OUTLOOK \_\_\_\_\_

REMARKS \_\_\_\_\_

**Figure 5-6. NHOP coordinated request for aircraft reconnaissance**

**TROPICAL CYCLONE PLAN OF THE DAY FORMAT  
--ATLANTIC AND CENTRAL PACIFIC OCEANS--**

FM: CARCAH, NATIONAL HURRICANE CENTER, MIAMI, FL

TO: (AFRC-APPROVED ADDRESSEES)/(NOAA-APPROVED ADDRESSEES)

SUBJECT: THE TROPICAL CYCLONE PLAN OF THE DAY  
VALID \_\_\_\_Z (MONTH) TO \_\_\_\_Z (MONTH) (YEAR)  
TCPOD NUMBER.....(YR)-\_\_\_\_\_

I. ATLANTIC REQUIREMENTS

1. (STORM NAME, DEPRESSION, SUSPECT AREA) or (NEGATIVE RECON REQUIREMENTS)

FLIGHT ONE (NHC PRIORITY, if applicable)

A. _____Z	FIX/INVEST TIME
(Resources permitting if applicable)	
_____Z	
B. _____	MISSION IDENTIFIER
C. _____Z	DEPARTURE LOCATION/TIME
D. _____	FORECAST POSITION
E. _____	DESTINATION
F. _____Z	TIME ON STATION
G. _____	ALTITUDE(S) ON STATION
H. _____	REMARKS (if needed)

FLIGHT TWO (if applicable, same as FLIGHT ONE)

2. (SECOND SYSTEM, if applicable, same as in 1. above)

3. OUTLOOK FOR SUCCEEDING DAY (NHC PRIORITY, if applicable)

A. POSSIBLE (Unit) ON STATION REQUIREMENT NEAR (Location)  
AT (Time) Z.

II. CENTRAL PACIFIC REQUIREMENTS (Same as in ATLANTIC)

**Figure 5-7. Tropical cyclone plan of the day format**

### **5.5.2. DOD and DOC Reconnaissance Aircraft Responsiveness.**

**5.5.2.1. Requirement Notification.** Notification of requirements must precede tasked-on-station time by at least 16 hours plus en route time to the area of concern.

**5.5.2.2. Prepositioning.** The "Succeeding Day Outlook" portion of the TCPOD provides advance notification of requirements and authorizes units to preposition aircraft to forward operating locations. For missions requiring prepositioning, the "Succeeding Day Outlook" may not provide adequate advance notification. In this situation, an "Additional Day Outlook" may be included in the TCPOD to authorize units to preposition aircraft.

**5.5.2.3. Resources Permitting.** When circumstances preclude the appropriate notification lead time, the requirement will be levied as "resources permitting." When a "resources permitting" requirement is levied in an amendment, the NHC will indicate the priority of all existing or remaining requirements.

**5.5.2.4. Emergency Requirement.** If a storm develops unexpectedly and could cause a serious threat to lives and property within a shorter time than provided for in the paragraphs above, CARCAH will contact the reconnaissance units, or higher headquarters, as appropriate, and request assistance in implementing emergency procedures not covered in this plan. The NHC and CPHC directors have authority to declare an emergency.

### **5.5.3. Reconnaissance Tropical Cyclone Plan of the Day.**

**5.5.3.1. Preparation.** The CARCAH will coordinate the TCPOD (Figure 5-7) daily during the period from June 1 to November 30 and at other times during the year as required. Transmitted TCPODs will be serially numbered each season.

- The CARCAH will coordinate the TCPOD with NHC, the 53 WRS, and NOAA AOC before publication.
- The TCPOD will list all DOC and DOD required tropical and subtropical cyclone reconnaissance operational missions and coordinated research missions. The remarks section of the TCPOD will include appropriate comments whenever research and operational flights overlap.
- The DOD-required tropical or subtropical cyclone reconnaissance missions in the Atlantic or the Pacific west to 180° will be identified in the TCPOD as USN or USAF requirements.
- Amendments to the TCPOD will be published only when requirements change. When amended, the impact on each listed flight will be identified; i.e., No Change, Change Added, or Cancel.

**5.5.3.2. Dissemination.** The TCPOD will be made available to appropriate agencies, such as FAA, DOD, and NOAA, that provide support to or control of reconnaissance aircraft or are a part of the tropical cyclone warning service. Under normal circumstances, the TCPOD will be disseminated by 1900 UTC each day including weekends and holidays. If there are no current day or succeeding-day reconnaissance requirements, a negative report, which covers the appropriate time frame, will be disseminated. Amendments will be disseminated as required.

[NOTE: The TCPOD is disseminated under the header "MIAREPRPD" for AFOS users and under "NOUS42 KNHC: for AFMEDS/AWDS users. The TCPOD can also be seen on the Internet at [www.hurricanehunters.com/wxdata.htm](http://www.hurricanehunters.com/wxdata.htm) and clicking on Plan of the Day.]

#### **5.5.4. Air Traffic Control (ATC) Clearances.**

**5.5.4.1. Air Traffic Control Clearances.** Flight plans for reconnaissance and research flights shall be filed with the FAA as soon as practicable before departure time.

**5.5.4.2. Prior Coordination.** The 53 WRS Current Operations/mission commander and participating research aircraft mission representatives will contact the FAA Air Traffic Control System Command Center (ATCSCC) at (703) 904-4525 prior to departure and relay the following data:

- Mission call-sign.
- Departure point and estimated time of departure.
- Approximate route to be flown.
- Requested altitude(s).
- Any special requests.

The ATCSCC will then coordinate with all impacted FAA facilities.

**5.5.4.3. Air Traffic Control (ATC) Separation.** ATC will provide separation between all aircraft on instrument flight rules in other than Class G airspace. Nonparticipating aircraft may be operating near storm areas; therefore, adherence to ATC clearances is mandatory for safety. When appropriate, military pilots shall clearly state to ATC that a segment of flight will be conducted under the provisions of "due regard."

**5.5.4.4. Assigned Altitudes.** When storm aircraft are unable to maintain assigned altitudes due to turbulence, ATC shall be advised. When deviation from assigned altitude is required, the pilot shall coordinate with ATC and obtain a clearance prior to changing altitudes. When numerous changes in altitude will be required, the pilot should request a "block altitude" clearance from ATC. Any deviations from ATC clearance shall first be coordinated with the appropriate ATC facility.



**5.5.4.5. Release of Dropsondes.** When operationally feasible, dropsonde releases shall be coordinated with the appropriate ATC facility and with participating aircraft at least 10 minutes prior to sensor release. Contact between participating aircraft will be made using the frequencies listed in paragraph 5.9.3.

**5.5.4.6. ATC Communications Backup.** Those TEAL aircraft that have the capability to communicate digitally may use CARCAH for communications relay with ATC when voice communications are either unavailable or unusable. This capability should only be used to preclude an emergency or other safety related situations.

## **5.6. Reconnaissance Effectiveness Criteria.**

**5.6.1. General.** Specified reconnaissance times are established to allow sufficient time for the forecaster to analyze the data before issuing an advisory. Every effort should be made to obtain data at scheduled times. The following criteria will be used to assess reconnaissance mission effectiveness:

### **5.6.1.1. Tropical Cyclone Fix Mission.**

- **ON-TIME.** The fix is made not earlier than 1 hour before nor later than 1/2 hour after scheduled fix time.
- **EARLY.** The fix is made from 1 hour before scheduled fix time to one-half of the time interval to the preceding scheduled fix, not to exceed 3 hours.
- **LATE.** The fix is made within the interval from 1/2 hour after scheduled fix time to one-half of the time interval to the succeeding scheduled fix, not to exceed 3 hours.
- **MISSED.** Data are not obtained within the parameters specified for on-time, early, or late.

[NOTE: Appropriate credit will be given when the aircraft arrives in the requested area but is unable to locate a center due to storm dissipation or rapid movement. Credit will also be given for radar fixes if penetration is not possible due to geographic or other flight restrictions.]

### **5.6.1.2. Tropical Cyclone Investigative Missions.**

- **ON-TIME.** An observation must be taken within 250 nm of the specified coordinates by the scheduled time.

- **LATE.** An observation is taken within 250 nm of the specified coordinates after the scheduled time but not later than the scheduled time plus 2 hours.
- **MISSED.** When the aircraft fails to be within 250 nm of the specified coordinates by the scheduled time plus 2 hours.

#### **5.6.1.3. Synoptic Surveillance Missions.**

- **SATISFIED.** Requirements are considered satisfied upon completion of the assigned track and the acquired dropwindsonde data are transmitted from the aircraft prior to the HPC/MPC deadline for synoptic analysis.
- **MISSED.** When parameters listed in para A. above are not satisfied.

**5.6.2. Mission Assessment.** The NHC or CPHC will provide CARCAH a written assessment of the reconnaissance mission anytime its timeliness or quality is outstanding or substandard (see Figure 5-8). Mission requirements levied as "resources permitting" will not be assessed for timeliness but may be assessed for quality of data gathered.

**5.6.3. Summaries.** CARCAH will maintain monthly and seasonal reconnaissance summaries, detailing missions actually flown to satisfy NHC-levied requirements.

### **5.7. Aerial Reconnaissance Weather Encoding, Reporting, and Coordination.**

**5.7.1. Vortex Data.** The detailed vortex data message (Figure 5-4) will be prepared with all observed vortex fix information for all scheduled fixes. For intermediate fixes, either an abbreviated or detailed vortex data message (AVDM or DVDM) may be transmitted, depending upon availability of information and forecaster requirements.

**5.7.2. Center Fix Data.** When proximity to land, air traffic control restriction, or other factors prevent actual penetration of the vortex by the reconnaissance aircraft, it is permissible to fix the cyclone by radar. All aircraft radar fix reports will be made in plain text and appended to a RECCO observation taken at fix time or to a supplementary vortex data message completed up to the time of the radar fix, e.g., RADAR CENTER FIX 21.5N 83.0W, POOR RADAR PRESENTATION, NAV ACCURACY 5Nm. The remark stating the type of radar fix and quality of the radar presentation is in accordance with Chapter 7, paragraph 7.3.3.

**5.7.3. Peripheral Data.** Storm penetration and collection of peripheral data will normally begin at the operational altitude approximately 105 nm from the center as determined by the flight meteorologist. The Supplementary Vortex Data Message (Figure 5-5) will be encoded and reported as specified in Table 5-1.

**MISSION EVALUATION FORM**

MEMORANDUM FOR: OL-A, 53WRS/CARCAH

FROM: \_\_\_\_\_ (Director, NHC, CPHC)

SUBJECT: Mission \_\_\_\_\_ Evaluation  
(Mission Identifier)

**PUBLISHED REQUIREMENTS:**

Permission Coordinates (As Updated Prior to TKO) \_\_\_\_\_ N \_\_\_\_\_ W

Flight Pattern \_\_\_\_\_

Mission Requirements Times \_\_\_\_\_

**RECONNAISSANCE MISSION PERFORMANCE:**

Flight Flown: \_\_\_\_\_ Completely \_\_\_\_\_ Partially \_\_\_\_\_ Other

Horizontal Data Coverage: \_\_\_\_\_ Complete \_\_\_\_\_ Timely \_\_\_\_\_ Accurate  
\_\_\_\_\_ Incomplete \_\_\_\_\_ Untimely \_\_\_\_\_ Inaccurate

Vertical Data Coverage: \_\_\_\_\_ Complete \_\_\_\_\_ Timely \_\_\_\_\_ Accurate  
\_\_\_\_\_ Incomplete \_\_\_\_\_ Untimely \_\_\_\_\_ Inaccurate

Requirements Accomplished: \_\_\_\_\_ On Time \_\_\_\_\_ Early \_\_\_\_\_ Late  
\_\_\_\_\_ Missed

**OVERALL MISSION EVALUATION:**

OUTSTANDING \_\_\_\_\_

UNSATISFACTORY \_\_\_\_\_ FOR:

COMPLETENESS \_\_\_\_\_ TIMELINESS \_\_\_\_\_ ACCURACY \_\_\_\_\_

EQUIPMENT \_\_\_\_\_ PROCEDURES \_\_\_\_\_ OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

**REMARKS:** (Brief but specific)

\_\_\_\_\_  
FORECASTER'S SIGNATURE

**Figure 5-8. Mission evaluation form**

**5.7.4. Mission Coordination.** Mission coordination for all missions will be accomplished through CARCAH. Meteorological discussions for Central Pacific missions may be accomplished directly with the CPHC; however, any changes to tasking will be accomplished through CARCAH.

**5.7.5. Post-flight Debriefing.** Unless otherwise directed, the flight meteorologist will provide either an airborne or post-flight debriefing to the appropriate hurricane center through CARCAH to ensure all observations were received and understood.

**5.7.6. Mission Identifier.** Regular weather and hurricane reconnaissance messages will include the five-digit agency/aircraft indicator followed by the CARCAH-assigned mission/storm-system indicator. Elements of the mission identifier follow:

Agency/Aircraft	Mission Storm System Indicator			
Agency + Aircraft Number <sup>1,2</sup>	Sequential number of mission in this storm	Depression number or XX/YY/ZZ, if not a depression or greater	Location A,C, or W <sup>3</sup>	Storm name or words CYCLONE, INVEST, or TRAIN
	For non-tasked missions, WXWX, or for a numbered depression or stronger, WX+ depression number.			

-EXAMPLES-

AF966 0201C CYCLONE	(USAF aircraft 966 on the second mission on tropical depression number 1 in the Central Pacific. Invest or fix as specified in the TCPOD.)
AF984 0403E CARLOS	(USAF aircraft 984 on the fourth mission on tropical depression 3 which formed in the Eastern Pacific, acquired the name Carlos, then moved in the Central Pacific.)
NOAA2 01XXA INVEST	(NOAA aircraft 42RF on the first mission to investigate a suspect area in the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico or Caribbean.)
NOAA3 WX01A AGNES	(NOAA aircraft 43RF on a non-tasked mission into AGNES.)

<sup>1</sup> AF plus last 3 digits of tail number

<sup>2</sup> NOAA, plus last digit of aircraft registration number

<sup>3</sup> A=Atlantic, Caribbean, or Gulf of Mexico, C=Central Pacific, W=Western Pacific

**5.7.7. Observation Numbering and Content.** The mission identifier will be the first mandatory remark followed by the observation number and the four-letter International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) identifier for the station that copied and disseminated the observation--a change initiated for the 1998 hurricane season.

**5.7.7.1. First Weather Observation.** In addition, the first weather observation will have appended as remarks the four-letter ICAO identifier for the departure station, time of departure, and estimated time of arrival (ETA) at the invest points, coordinates of the storm, or control point, as applicable.

-EXAMPLE-

URNT11 KNHC DDZZZZ  
97779 TEXT TEXT...  
RMK AF987 0308A EMMY OB 01 KNHC DPTD KBIX AT 10/2100Z ETA 31.5N 75.0W  
11/0015Z  
NNNN

**5.7.7.2. Numbering Scheme.** All observations (RECCO, vortex, supplemental, and dropsonde) from the first to the last will be numbered sequentially. The Improved Weather Reconnaissance System (IWRs) will automatically number HDOB sequentially, but separately from other observations. When an aircraft is diverted from its original mission to fulfill NHC requirements, conclude the original mission by using the last report remark. The next observation from the diverted aircraft will be labeled OB 01, will use the CARCAH-assigned mission identifier, and will include time of diversion and ETA of coordinates of interest.

-EXAMPLE-

URNT10 KNHC DDZZZZ  
97779 TEXT TEXT...  
RMK AF987 01XXA INVEST OB 01 KNHC DPTD AF987 WX MISSION AT 05/1235Z ETA  
18N 85W 05/1630Z  
NNNN

**5.7.7.3. Final Weather Observation.** Append to the final weather observation a remark that includes ETA, destination, number of observations (excluding HDOB), and monitor(s) that copied the observations.

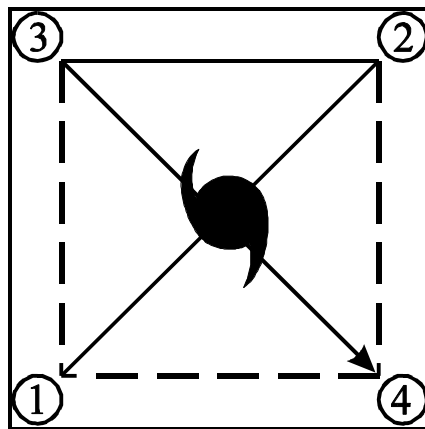
-EXAMPLE-

URNT10 KNHC DDZZZZ  
97779 TEXT TEXT...  
RMK AF987 0317A JOAN OB 16 KNHC ETA KBIX 15/2030Z. LAST REPORT OBS 01  
THRU 16 TO KNHC.  
NNNN

**5.8. Operational Flight Patterns.** This section details the operational flight patterns that provide vortex and peripheral data on tropical and subtropical cyclones.

**5.8.1. Flight Pattern ALPHA Operational Details.**

**5.8.1.1. Flight Levels and Sequence.** Flight levels will normally be 1,500 ft, 925 hPa, 850 hPa, or 700 hPa, depending on data requirements and flight safety. Legs will normally be 105 nm long and flown on intercardinal tracks (45 degrees off cardinal tracks). The flight sequence is shown in Figure 5-9. The pattern can be started at any intercardinal point and then repeated throughout the mission. Prior to starting an inbound or outbound track the aircrew should evaluate all available data, e.g., radar presentation, satellite photo, for flight safety. Once started on course, every effort should be made to maintain a straight track and the tasked altitude. A horizontal observation is required at each leg end point. This data is transmitted immediately. The ALPHA pattern may be modified to satisfy unique customer requirements (such as extending legs to examine the wind profile of a strong storm) or because of proximity of land or warning areas.



**Figure 5-9. Flight pattern ALPHA**

**5.8.1.2. Vortex fix data.** On each transit of the center a fix will be made and a vortex data message completed. If it is a scheduled fix, the detailed vortex data message will be completed using data gathered on the inbound track since the previous fix and will be transmitted immediately. If it is an intermediate (non-scheduled) fix, an abbreviated vortex data message using data gathered on the inbound track since the previous fix may be prepared in lieu of the detailed message and transmitted immediately. Center dropsonde data will also be provided for scheduled fixes made at 700 hPa or above. The dropsonde will be released at the flight-level center coordinates (item BRAVO of the vortex data message). When making a fix from 925 hPa, 850 hPa, or 700 hPa, the sea-level pressure will be extrapolated using the tables in Appendix F or by using an approved computer program.

**5.8.1.3. Supplementary Vortex Messages (SVDM).** Two SVDM (one ALPHA pattern) will normally be provided per fix mission. Requests for additional SVDM will be directed to CARCAH. When high density data is not available, supplementary vortex data messages will be provided with each fix.

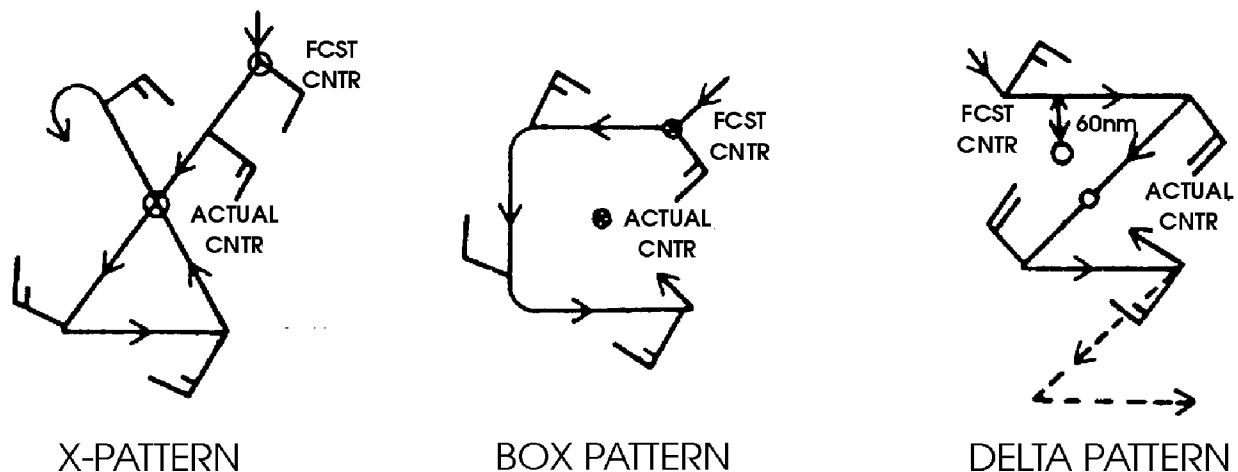
**5.8.2. Investigative Missions.** An investigative mission is tasked on tropical disturbances to determine the existence or non-existence of a closed circulation, supply reconnaissance observations in required areas, and locate the vortex center, if any.

**5.8.2.1. Flight Levels.** Flight level will normally be at or below 1,500 ft absolute altitude but may be adjusted as dictated by data requirements, meteorological conditions, or flying safety factors.

**5.8.2.2. Vortex Fix.** A detailed vortex data message is required if a vortex fix is made.

**5.8.2.3. Closed Circulation.** A closed circulation is supported by at least one sustained wind reported in each quadrant of the cyclone. Surface winds are preferred.

**5.8.2.4. Flight Pattern.** The preferred approach is to fly to the tasked coordinates of the forecasted center and then execute a pattern as observed conditions dictate. Suggested patterns are the X, Box, or Delta patterns, but the flight meteorologist may choose any approach. See Figure 5-10. Turns are usually made to take advantage of tailwinds whenever possible.



**Figure 5-10. Suggested patterns for investigative missions**

- On the X pattern, the aircraft is turned to head directly towards the center, as indicated by the surface or flight level winds. The aircraft is flown through the calm center until winds from the opposite direction occur (second quadrant). The aircraft is then turned to a cardinal heading until a wind shift occurs (third quadrant). Finally, the aircraft is turned towards the center and flown straight through the center to the last quadrant.

- On the Box pattern, the aircraft is flown on cardinal headings around the suspected center. The track resembles three sides of a square.

- On the Delta pattern, the aircraft is flown on a cardinal heading to pass 60 nm from the forecasted center. After observing a wind shift (second quadrant) the aircraft is turned to pass through the center until winds from the opposite direction occur (third quadrant). Finally, the aircraft is turned on a cardinal heading (parallel to the initial heading) to pick up the fourth quadrant winds. If data indicate that the aircraft is far north of any existing circulation, the pattern is extended as shown by the dashed lines.

[NOTE: The depicted pattern may be converted to a mirror image if entry is made from a different direction.]

**5.8.3. Synoptic Surveillance Missions.** A synoptic surveillance mission is tasked to measure the large-scale wind and thermodynamic fields within approximately 800 nautical miles of tropical cyclones. Specific flight tracks will vary depending on storm location and synoptic situation.

## **5.9. Aircraft Reconnaissance Communications**

**5.9.1. General.** The U.S. Air Force and NOAA WP-3D aircraft will normally transmit reconnaissance observations via the Air Force Satellite Communications System (AFSATCOM), Aircraft-to-Satellite Data Link (ASDL), or high frequency (HF) radio phone patch. The NOAA G-IV will normally transmit WMO Temp Drop messages via INMARSAT commercial SATCOM. Flight meteorologists should contact CARCAH following the first fix and periodically throughout the mission.

**5.9.2. Air-to-Ground Communications (HF Radio).** The weather reconnaissance crew may relay weather data via direct telephone patch to the weather data monitor. Monitors will evaluate these reports and disseminate them through the Air Force's Automated Weather Network (AWN) or to the weather communications facility in Suitland, MD. When requested, aeronautical stations will provide a discrete frequency for mission use, if possible. Specific radio procedures and terminology will comply with Allied Communications Publication 125, "Standard Telephone and Radio Procedures." The use of IMMEDIATE precedence for transmission of hurricane reconnaissance data is authorized because of the perishable nature and potential operational impact of weather data. Data will be routed by direct phone patch between the aircraft and the Miami Weather Monitor (CARCAH). In the Central Pacific, Hickam Weather Monitor (Letterman) is



available if communications with CARCAH are difficult.

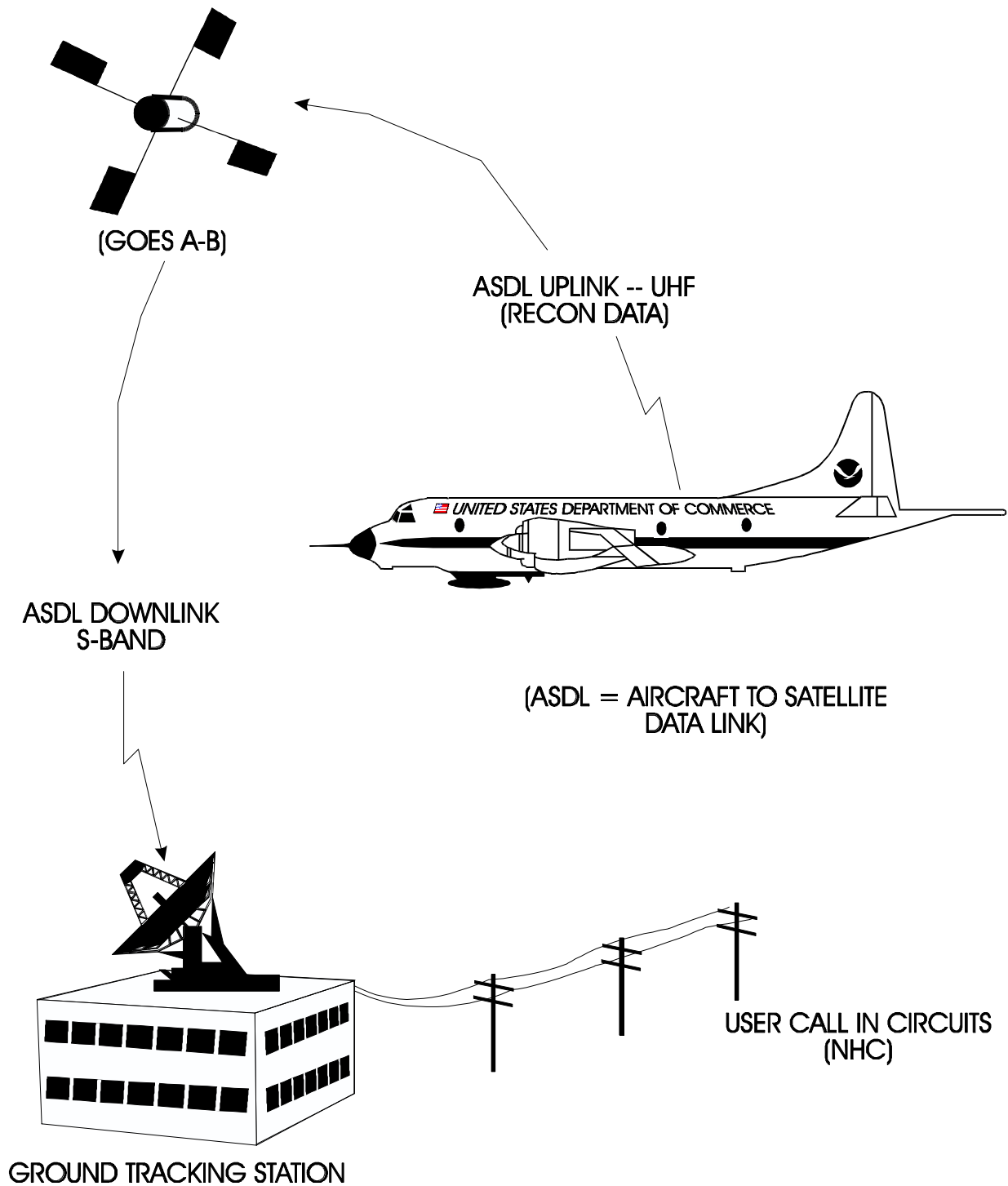
**5.9.3. Air-to-Air Communications.** When more than one reconnaissance aircraft is known to be operating in a particular area of interest, the following frequencies will be used for airplane-to-airplane communications and coordination unless otherwise directed by air traffic control:

- Primary: VHF 123.05 MHz.
- Secondary: UHF 304.8 MHz.
- Backup: HF 4701 KHz USB.

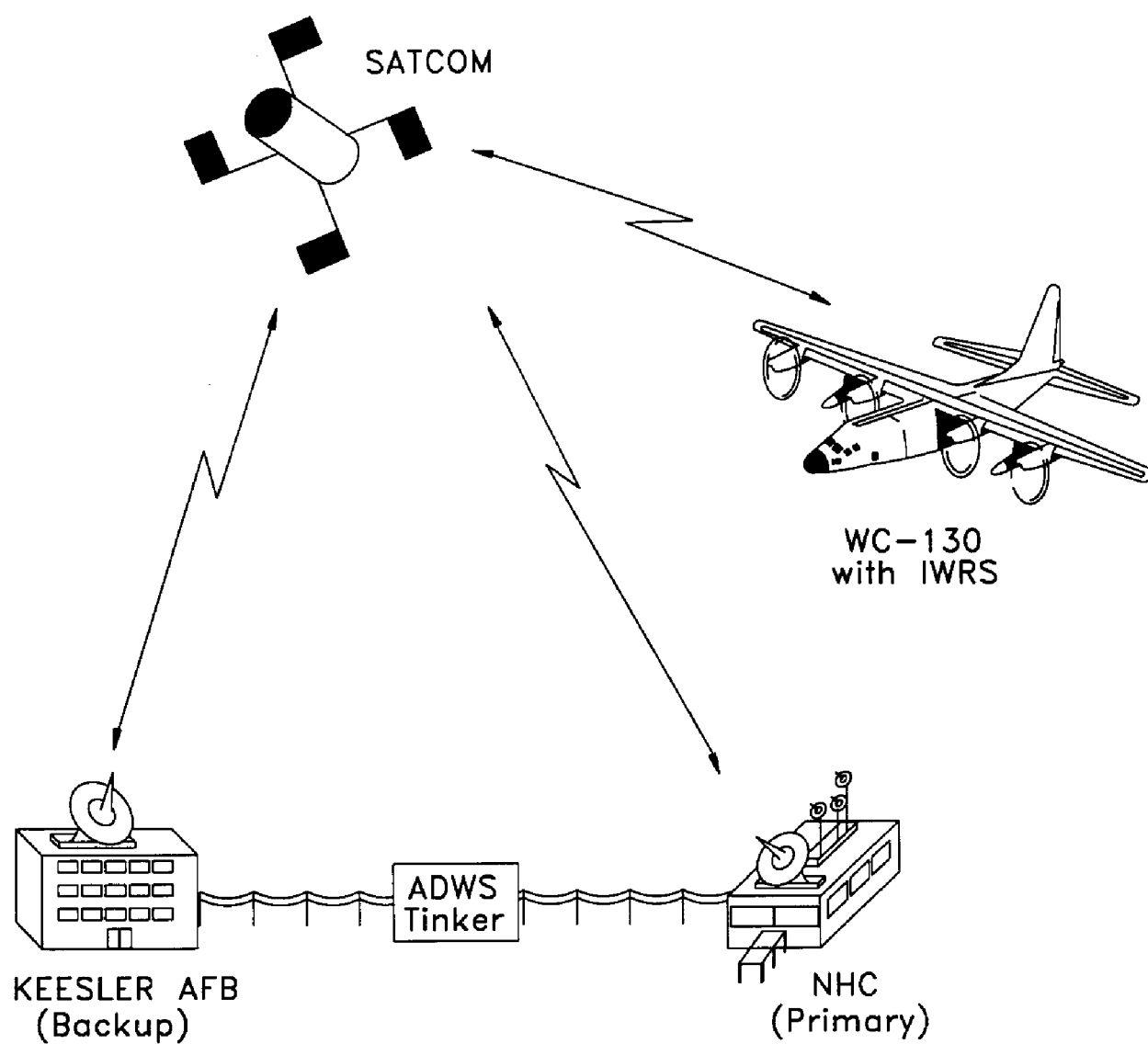
**5.9.4. Aircraft-to-Satellite Data Link (ASDL)-Equipped Aircraft.** Aircraft so equipped have the option to utilize the ASDL system. Figure 5-11 depicts these communications links.

**5.9.4.1. Data Transmission Test.** Prior to the beginning of the hurricane season, each ASDL-equipped aircraft will perform a ground or airborne test of the equipment and data ground-handling procedures to determine the equipment reliability, transmission errors, and time lapse between transmission of the data from the aircraft and receipt of the data by the hurricane forecaster. Test data will be forwarded to the Chairman, Working Group for Hurricane and Winter Storms Operations and Research.

**5.9.5. Improved Weather Reconnaissance System (IWRS)-Equipped Aircraft.** The AFRC aircraft equipped with IWRS will use the SATCOM data link with ground stations at TPC/NHC and at Keesler AFB, MS, to relay data to the NHC and the AWN. Figure 5-12 depicts these communications links.



**Figure 5-11. Schematic of aircraft-to-satellite data link for NOAA P-3 aircraft**



**Figure 5-12. Schematic of aircraft-to-satellite data link for AFRES WC-130 aircraft**